

OBSERVATIONS

UPON THE

Mission held in the City of Halifax,

NOVEMBER 11TH TO NOVEMBER 22D, 1883.

ADDRESSED TO THE

CLERGY AND LAITY OF HIS DIOCESE.

BY

HIBBERT, BISHOP OF NOVA SCOTIA.

HALIFAX, N. S. :

GEO. W. BAILLIE, PRINTER,

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OBSERVATIONS.

THE MISSION was arranged by the Rectors of St. Luke's Cathedral and St. George's, with my sanction, and preparation was made for some weeks previous to its commencement, meetings being held for prayer and intercession, and suitable tracts being distributed. On the evening of November 10th, at a special service in St. Luke's, I commended the Missioners, (five in number including the Rev. William Cogswell,) to the grace of God, and formally committed to them the work for which they had been invited, expressing my trust that they would, preach not themselves but Christ Jesus the Lord, setting Him forth in His several offices, as the centre to which the eyes of all were to be directed, whence through various channels all grace is conveyed to man.

I now express my thankfulness for the manifest answer to our prayers, in the blessing vouchsafed to the labours of the Missioners, within my own knowledge; unbelievers have been convinced, sleepers have been awakened, and soldiers of Christ have been stimulated to increased vigour and determination, in fighting the good fight of faith. And doubtless there are many more, of whom we shall have no knowledge until the last day shall declare them. May God grant unto them all the grace of perseverance, and perform the good work which He hath begun in them until the day of Jesus Christ.

I am bold to say that, if nothing else had been done, it would have been worth while to bring those men here, for the three great meetings in the Music Hall, where some attracted by curiosity received instruction which would not otherwise have reached their ears, and where none, unless utterly hardened, could hear unmoved the forcible appeals and exhortations of the preachers, to the tenor of which no Christian could take exception. But advantage has been taken of the plain speaking, and perhaps somewhat exaggerated utterances, of the most powerful and attractive of these Missioners, upon *one* topic, to nullify in some minds the beneficial effect of what was unquestionably sound and good in their teaching; and some who were pricked at the heart, and rendered uneasy by the faithful denunciations of sin and warnings to the impenitent, have it is to be

feared lulled to sleep their awakened consciences, by persuading themselves that the preachers were in error.

Erroneous reports of a Sermon which has now gained much notoriety, have been freely circulated, and writers in newspapers and even, (I say it with shame,) ministers in their pulpits have affirmed, or plainly intimated, that the Preacher ignored the elementary truth that God alone can forgive sin. They might have known, what is clear even from the defective newspaper reports, that they were in danger of bearing false witness; and I affirm from my own memory, which is confirmed by the extracts given below from his printed sermon,* that he insisted upon this truth, that Christ Himself is the one only Absolver, and that the Priest is only the instrument employed by Him, just as in Baptism and Communion the earthly elements are used as channels for conveying His grace, "the means whereby we receive the same, and the pledge to assure us thereof." There is no inconsistency in this teaching, in the apprehension of those who believe that God is pleased ordinarily to work by means, and that He has instituted "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace given to us."

Moreover the Missioner insisted upon what is well known to be everywhere held as the theory of confession, that the confession in every case is made directly to God Himself, the Priest being present as a witness, and a helper, ready to pronounce the absolution, in the name of Jesus Christ, to each one whom he believes to be truly penitent, and not otherwise† Because we do not accept their teaching, we are not on that account justified in imputing to men tenets which they utterly abhor, and which they have definitely repudiated.

There has been no attempt to prove that private confession is essential, for although the Preacher may have used some words and

* "Just as of old when the suffering woman said, 'If I may but touch the hem of his garment I shall be whole,' she did not feel that it was coming between her and Him, but only the channel of conveying His healing power; so now bread and wine—water—the hands of the Bishop—the lips of a priest, they are but the hem of Christ's garment, the channels of conveying the grace which flows from Christ's holy person alone."

"Again there is no power of cleansing from sin but the blood of Jesus. 'Those are they who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb.' The absolution is but the means whereby the blood is applied to the individual soul. I believe that there are not many moments in men's lives, when they feel so near their Lord, so deep a sense of a personal Saviour, as when with true penitent hearts and lively faith they receive the seal of their pardon, the assurance of their forgiveness through the words of absolution."—*Sermon by Rev. J. B. Maturin.*

† If a person comes to me to confession, and I believe him to be impenitent, I am bound to refuse him Absolution; and if I were to give him Absolution, thinking him penitent when he was not, that Absolution would do him no good, nothing but harm. No sacramental ordinance is of any avail, unless it be received with proper dispositions; and the proper disposition for receiving Absolution is penitence. Absolution may be given, and may be like the seed upon the hard ground, which bears no fruit. Therefore the strongest preaching of priestly Absolution does not in the least interfere with, but rather necessitates very strong preaching of repentance.—*Maturin's Sermon.*

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illustrations likely to be misapprehended, he definitely declared that, while he believed it to be very helpful, it was *not* to be regarded as a necessary condition of the remission of sin. The question between him and his opponents is therefore in reality, whether according to the teaching of Holy Scripture, our God has been pleased to employ or sanction any human agency in imparting forgiveness of sin?

Now unless we are prepared to reject the interpretation accepted in all ages by the Universal Church, we must answer in the affirmative. The "Power of the Keys" is recognized in the Protestant Confessions of Faith, of Augsburg, of Bohemia, and of Westminster, and in Jewel's Apology, which has always been regarded as an authoritative document of the Church of England, and in her Prayer Book. And the right of Christian ministers to use the power, is based upon the gift of our Lord to the Apostles, as transmitted through successive ages. Before His death He had conferred the power to bind and to loose, and immediately after the completion of our redemption, on the day of His Resurrection, He instituted the ministry for all ages, saying to His Apostles, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you; and when He had said this He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain they are retained." The Church of England has deliberately adopted this form, and our Ordination Service would be blasphemous if it were not strictly Scriptural.

They who dispute the propriety of this form object that it was not the primitive form, that in fact these words were not used in the ordination of Priests until the thirteenth Century; and this is true, but if the authority was originally conferred, it must belong to all who are ordained to the office, and commissioned to discharge the functions of the ministry of reconciliation, whether the words are actually recited or not. The Primate of the Church of Ireland has however shewn, in a Charge published in 1873, that the words were used at the ordination and consecration of Bishops from the very earliest ages. The prayer of consecration given in the so called Apostolic Constitutions, and another, in an ancient manuscript representing the use of the Western Church in the fourth Century, ask for this power. There are other ancient manuscripts of the same tenor; and the reason for this use of the words was probably that "the Bishop in the Primitive Church, was considered to be the proper minister of absolution, and all the power of discipline was lodged in his hands. But inasmuch as the needs of the Church required more than he was able personally to perform, the Presbyters, as his proper assistants, were taken in to be fellow laborers with him, and to act on his commission, (*i. e.* merely as his deputies) in administering discipline. As the Church increased in numbers, more and more of the work was committed to the Presbyters. But the ancient view lingered long in the Church. It was not till the thirteenth Century that our Lord's commission was

introduced into the service for the ordering of Priests, and the power of the Keys, which they had hitherto exercised as assistants to the Bishop, was conferred upon them directly and personally, in the words of the shepherd and bishop of their souls. The change appears to have been a reasonable one; as the Presbyters of the Church already executed the functions these words conferred, by preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, by prayer, and exercising the discipline of the Church, it seems proper that the authority should be conveyed to them direct, and not merely by commission as assistants to the Bishop.* However this may be, the Primate has evidently arrived at his conclusions, after careful investigation; and if he is correct, the objection, based upon the supposed late introduction of the words into the Ordination Service, is thoroughly refuted. Moreover, with reference to their meaning, he says, (and it is to be observed that he is a very decided anti-ritualist,) "there is not a vestige of authority for asserting, that the Church in any age sanctioned such an opinion, as that these words had respect only to sins against the Church, without any reference to sins as against God. What those words meant, when spoken to the Apostles, that they meant as applied in the ancient ordinals to the Bishops, and that they meant when they were transferred to the service of the ordination of the Priesthood, and that they also meant when retained by our reformers in the amended Ordinal."†

But since some persons confound this teaching with the baseless pretensions of the Church of Rome, I will give you the sentiments of a few of the most noted opponents of that Branch of the Church. Bishop Jewel already mentioned says, "Christ hath given to His 'ministers power to bind and to loose, to open and shut; and the 'office of loosing consisteth in this point, that the minister should 'offer by the preaching of the Gospel the merits of Christ, and full 'pardon, to such as have lowly and contrite hearts; promising unto 'the same a *sure and undoubted forgiveness* of their sins, and hope of 'everlasting salvation." Thomas Becon, Archbishop Cranmer's Chaplain, says, "when the minister shall rehearse unto you the most 'sweet and comfortable words of absolution, give earnest faith unto 'them, as though God Himself had spoken them, according to this 'saying of Christ, 'he that heareth you heareth me,' and 'whose 'soever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them'" John Calvin "is very decided, saying, "when Christ gave the Apostles power to 'remit sins, He did not only mean that they should loose men from 'their sins, before their first conversion, but rather that they should 'exercise this function perpetually among the faithful." And in several places he refers to this authority, as essential to the existence of the visible Church. We have a long catalogue of the most distinguished Divines of our Church, from the time of the Reformation, assuming the existence of this authority in the Priesthood.

* Charge delivered by the Archbishop of Armagh in 1873. p. 19.

† Archbishop's charge—Appendix, p. 57.

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We now refer to the Prayer Book, as containing the clearest enunciation of the doctrines of the Church, as exemplified in practice. The order for daily prayer is sufficient evidence of her doctrine. Observe the title of the absolution, following after the confession of sin. It might have been called a declaration of God's readiness to forgive sins, but the words actually used are very definite; "The absolution or remission of sins, to be pronounced by the Priest," not as other parts of the service, to be read or said, or like the commandments to be rehearsed, but to be *pronounced*, a formal authoritative word being selected. Then we have the solemn assertion, that God hath given power and commandment to His ministers to declare and *pronounce*, (observe the word again,) to His people being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins, which then the Priest immediately proceeds officially to pronounce to all present, who truly repent and unfeignedly believe the Gospel. Can any one suppose that this is nothing more than a statement of God's readiness to pardon, such as every Christian man and woman may address to others? Is not the word "power" indicative of a special gift enabling the Priest to do something that an ordinary person cannot do? In the office of the Holy Communion, we have a prayer thus introduced, "Then shall the Priest, (or the Bishop 'being present,') stand up and turning himself to the people *pronounce this Absolution*." Can it be pretended that this is nothing more than a prayer, or benediction, which any Christian may offer for another? Is it not an insult to our common sense, to ask us to accept such a representation of the meaning and intention of these forms and rubrics? Is it not still more insulting, to the compilers and revisers of our Prayer Book, to suggest that they would have used language, which could not fail to mislead the simple and unlearned, if it were not intended to be taken in its plain literal signification? Surely we are bound to assume that they deliberately adopted the phraseology employed, and that they were careful to express their meaning distinctly, in a Book intended for the use of the illiterate multitude as much as for clergy and scholars. When therefore we hear the Priest pronounce the general absolution, in the daily service and that in the Communion Office applied still more definitely to those present, we may each be assured, that if we do earnestly repent and unfeignedly believe, the pardon is confirmed to each one individually, as much as if we had received personal absolution. And this I believe to be the mode in which the power, committed to every Priest of the Church of England, is ordinarily to be exercised.

But besides this our Church has also provided for a specific exercise of this power, in the exhortation to the Holy Communion, where any person whose conscience is troubled is invited to come to a Priest,* and open his grief or in other words declare what troubles

* I say advisedly a *Priest*, for no one acquainted with ecclesiastical phraseology could suppose that a Deacon may be described as a "discreet and learned minister

his conscience, after having "examined his life and conversation by "the rule of God's commandments," that by the ministry of God's Holy Word he may receive the benefit of *absolution*. It is lamentable that men have attempted to explain away this plain language, alledging that it means nothing more than reading or expounding the Scriptures; but we ask again, why was a word used which was sure to be misunderstood, if it was not to be taken in its common familiar meaning? Why say *absolution* and suggest the "benefit of "absolution," if something else was intended, and he is not to receive absolution at all?

Lastly we have the office for the Visitation of the Sick, where the directions are so clear, and definite, the very words of the absolution being specified, that it is impossible to devise any plausible misinterpretation of them. Consequently the ministers who do not accept the doctrine of the Church, by whose authority they officiate, refuse to use the office, sheltering themselves under the 67th Canon, of which the application may well be disputed, but in any case the testimony to the doctrine of the Church furnished by this rubric and form of absolution is unimpeachable, a fact whereof the refusal to use it is sufficient evidence.

The language of the Prayer Book is indeed so clear that the so-called reformed Church has been organized by persons who felt that they could no longer honestly occupy official positions in the Church of England. For the same reason a Society has been formed in England to procure a revision of the Prayer Book, expunging these expressions which cannot be explained away, and an application has lately been made by it to the Archbishop of Canterbury, asking him to move for a Roy l Commission in furtherance of this object, but his Grace has declined to aid them. These objections however confirm our contention as to the unmistakeable meaning of the language as at present addressed to us.

The following observations upon auricular confession and private absolution are reprinted from my Charge to the Clergy delivered in 1874 :—

Auricular confession, or private confession at the ear of the Priest, is as you know obligatory in the Church of Rome, and declared to be necessary for salvation; but this obligation only dates from the Lateran Council in the thirteenth Century. According to the teaching of our own branch, it is generally admitted that such confession is not *enjoined*, and the question is, whether it is encouraged or even allowed. The maintainers of the affirmative have at least this *prima facie* support, that it is twice recommended, under

of God's Word," since a reference to the ordination service shews that he is not regarded as a minister of God's word at all. He is only a probationer, and could not in any case be referred to as a discreet and learned minister, and moreover the distinction is marked in the 32nd Canon, where we read that the office of Deacon is a step or degree to the ministry.

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particular circumstances, in the Prayer Book, and that it is *not* enumerated among the Romish abuses condemned in the Articles, and that it is formally sanctioned by the 113th Canon. That there is a prevalent strong prejudice against the practice of auricular confession we all know, but popular prejudices are not always reasonable, and are very often traceable to a confusion between the use and abuse of their subject matter. That confession is a condition of forgiveness, requires no proof, for we all believe that "if we *confess* our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Here confession to God alone is mentioned, but many sins are also against our neighbors, and some occasion public scandal. In these cases, we learn from Holy Scripture, what accords with our own judgment, that there should be confession also to the person injured, or to the whole Church, and not only so, but where possible restitution or satisfaction, as set forth in the exhortation to the Holy Communion.

In primitive days such confession was public, and the restoration of this discipline, the Church in the Communion Service, affirms to be desirable. But it was afterwards deemed expedient, to substitute private confession, and penance, until at length penance was elevated to the rank of a sacrament, and an elaborate system was adopted, requiring an accurate investigation of the details of every sin, in order to determine the penance to be enjoined as a satisfaction. Hence arise the objections most commonly urged against confession, as part of the sacrament of penance, and therefore necessitating these minute enquiries and disclosures. But setting aside the notion of satisfaction, to be made according to the Roman system, there is no occasion for such exact scrutiny. The confessor being made acquainted with the nature of the sin, and being satisfied of the penitence of the sinner, may grant absolution, without any such minute investigation; and if this distinction were admitted and understood to be practically recognised, the most effective objections now urged against the practice would be obviated.

That auricular confession, as at present understood, was not practised in the Primitive Church may be certainly affirmed, the confessions in those days having been made to the congregation, or at least the penance being openly performed, and the absolution invariably pronounced in public, even when the Priest had first been privately consulted. But in the third Century, a special officer was appointed in each Church, to receive confessions of secret sins, to prevent public scandal, which office however was abolished in the Eastern Church after about one hundred years. This is strong evidence against the present doctrine of the Church of Rome, that confession is obligatory, and essential to the pardon of sins. And one of the leading writers of that Church upon this subject says, "it would be untrue, and absolutely contrary to the mind of all the Fathers, to conclude that salvation could not be obtained without the exercise of penance. They held in the fullest

and most absolute sense the efficacy of true internal contrition.* And some of the strongest maintainers of the utility of confession, and of the sacramental character of absolution, such as Dr. Pusey, and Mr. Carter, state, that the Fathers use language altogether "inconsistent with any law or custom of compulsory confession."†

With respect to the teaching of our own reformed Branch of the Church, we are thankful that we are in harmony with the early ages. I think the fair inference is, that she would not have confession habitual, but that she recognises its benefits and would encourage its use, under certain circumstances, as set forth in the exhortation to the Holy Communion, and in the service for the visitation of the sick, and this with a view to absolution as expressly stated therein. We find too that the foreign Confessions of Faith generally agree, in maintaining the necessity of the power of the keys, with our own principal Divines since the reformation. They condemn the teaching that it is *necessary* for every one and that postbaptismal sin can only be pardoned through penance; but they agree that private confession of sin is beneficial, and may be necessary for *some* persons. Of our own Divines I think it may be well to quote at some length the words of one whose name is familiar, but whose works are probably not as well known to some of us as they ought to be. Hooker speaks as usual very cautiously, but in this case very decidedly.‡ "It is true that our Saviour by those words, 'whose sins ye remit they are remitted,' did ordain judges over sinful souls, give them authority to absolve from sin, and promise to ratify in heaven whatsoever they should do on earth, in execution of this their office. Howbeit all this, with two restrictions, which every jurisdiction in the world hath, the one that the practice thereof proceed in due order, the other that it do not extend itself beyond due bounds, which bounds have so confined penitential jurisdiction that, although there be given unto it power of remitting sin, yet not such sovereignty of power, that no sin should be pardonable in man without it." Again, "Albeit we willingly confess with St. Cyprian, 'the sins that are committed against Him, He only hath power to forgive who hath taken upon Him our sins, He which hath sorrowed and suffered for us, He whom God hath given for our offences,' yet neither did St. Cyprian intend to deny the power of the minister, otherwise than if he presume beyond his commission to remit sin, where God's own will is it should be retained."

"It pleaseth God, that men should sometimes, by missing this help, perceive how much they stand bound to him for so precious a benefit enjoyed."

"Strange it were unto me, that the Fathers, who so much everywhere extol the grace of Jesus Christ, in leaving unto his Church

* Morinus quoted by Carter Doctrine of Confession, p. 35.

† Carter, p. 27.

‡ Hooker Eccles. Pol. VI. Cap. 6, Sec. 3-5 Keble's Edition.

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ontrition.* confession, Dr. Pusey, altogether confession.† touching sin it only *declareth* us free from the guiltiness thereof, and restored unto God's favor; but concerning right in sacred and divine mysteries, whereof through sin we were made unworthy, as the power of the Church did before effectually bind and retain us from access to them, so upon our apparent repentance, it truly restoreth our liberty, looseth the chain wherewith we were tied, remitteth all whatsoever is passed, and accepteth us no less returned then if we had never gone astray."

You observe then Brethren, the clear distinction between the power of absolution, as explained by Hooker, and that maintained by Romanists since the Council of Trent; the former is declaratory and the latter strictly judicial, for "our Lord and Saviour," they say, "hath ordained His Priests judges, in such sort that no man which sinneth after baptism can be reconciled unto God but by their sentence."* If it be strictly a judicial act, then it follows that it is essential to pardon, and generally necessary to salvation. Now it is certain, that our Church has *not* required all her members to have recourse to the Priest for private confession and absolution, and therefore it follows, that she only recognises such absolution as declaratory, although she would have it highly valued, as an authoritative declaration, by officers duly commissioned for that purpose, and therefore bringing comfort to the soul of the penitent, and imparting well founded confidence in the time of affliction, and in the hour of death. That the form, "ego absolvo te," or I absolve thee, as retained in our absolution, is not necessarily judicial, is shown by Bingham;† and it appears to have been used for three centuries before absolution was decreed to be judicial. It must therefore mean, "I, having heard thy confession, believing thee to be penitent, and sincere in thy desire for pardon, do declare that in my judgment thou hast fulfilled the necessary conditions, and therefore I exercise the authority committed to me, and assure thee that thou art pardoned." Even the strictest maintainers of the judicial character of absolution, admit the necessity of contrition in the recipient, in order to give efficacy to the sentence;‡ and therefore the benefit is not more certain, according to the one theory, than according to the other.

The value of absolution whether public or private must depend upon the authority under which it is pronounced, and the attempt to make the form of Ordination of Priests bear a non-natural interpretation, would be called Jesuitical, by the persons who thus explain

* Hooker Eccles. Pol. VII, Cap. 6 Sec. 2.

† Antiquities Book XIX. Cap. 2, Sec. 6.

‡ It should however be added that although this was universally the case before the Council of Trent, it has been sometimes denied since the date of that Council.

away their meaning, if such tampering with words were attempted by an opposite party.* Those very solemn words have been pronounced over each of us, my Brethren; let us not lightly regard them, nor neglect the weighty commission thereby conferred upon us. I would fain hope, that none of us have presumed to accept ordination to the Priesthood, without being satisfied as to the propriety of the use of this form, for that would be sacrilege, and that, if unhappily any one so ordained has since adopted the opinion that they are not rightly used, or are meaningless, such an one will not continue to officiate under what is, in *his* judgment, a profane assumption. What these words meant when addressed to the Apostles, the same must be their meaning now; but the Bishop, is not supposed to give from himself, he is only a medium for the conveyance to others of God's gift. Christ breathed on the Apostles, and gave as from Himself; we can only by imposition of hands transmit to others what He has been pleased thus to bestow. We have no right to assume that the Apostles could read the hearts of men, that is the prerogative of God alone, and no such power is attributed to them anywhere, the gift of discerning of spirits being quite a different thing. They could not forgive absolutely, according to their own judgments, but they could pronounce the acquittal of those who gave satisfactory proofs of penitence and faith, and this authority is conferred on every Priest now. Some are unable to accept this high truth of God's word, but in reality there is no more difficulty in believing this now, than when the words were uttered. It is as hard to believe, that St. Matthew or St. John could remit sins, as that this power can be given by the Holy Ghost now, and with whatever qualifications it is to be accepted now, by the same it was modified then.

Let us not then, my Brethren, hesitate to invite heavy laden sinners to come to us, that we may point them to Christ, and that to those who have come to Him, but are still doubtful, and through fear of presumption unable to rest in His love, we may speak the comforting words assuring them of pardon, and bidding them be of good comfort. The words are provided for us, let us not neglect to use the exhortation.† But on the other hand, I earnestly entreat you, not to attempt to lay a yoke upon those for whom Christ died which may be intolerable. The intervention of the human agent may frequently be of great value, but this is owing to the infirmity of our nature, for which our Lord in His infinite mercy has compassionately provided, while they who can, by a direct act of faith, appropriate the promises, and discern the invisible, are stronger than they for whom such aid is indispensable.

Connected with confession and absolution, and often confounded with them, but in a great measure distinct is "direction." This is

* It is to be observed that the Ordination Services alone of all our services are specially mentioned and approved in one of the thirty-nine Articles.

† See in Appendix Bishop Moberley.

most frequently desired, and to satisfy this want peculiar qualifications are required in the minister, who ought indeed to be specially trained for this work. The confessor, acting only ministerially, may perform his duty well without any special ability: but he who acts also as a director requires much skill and wisdom, and can only be efficient after long experience. In common apprehension the two offices are invariably connected, and practically they are likely to be so very frequently. He who receives the confession of sins, and weaknesses, and doubts, and perplexities, is expected to be able to supply ghostly counsel and advice. There are many cases occurring in the life of man, where with the best intentions, it is very hard to determine for oneself what is right. Tender consciences are often troubled with needless scruples and doubts and fears, while persons of a different temperament, under the influence of self interest, or some other perverting cause, do not perceive the guilt of positive evil. The intervention of Nathan was required to arouse the sleeping conscience of David,* and we all know, with what soothing self deception the transgressor can commonly put away troublesome thoughts and stifle his convictions. But in confession the sinner has, as it were, to face the realities of his condition, his acts have to be clothed with form and substance, and are brought before him in their true proportions, and with the aid of a judicious counsellor he is enabled to detect secret motives and springs of action, which would have escaped his own unaided investigation. The advantage of having recourse to the ministers of religion, for aid of this kind and for spiritual advice is recognised by all who have any knowledge of human nature; and such confidential intercourse with the individual members of his congregation is sought by every minister, who has any regard for their welfare, and any earnest desire for the salvation of souls.

So far then as regards such intercourse, its value being admitted, the question is only whether it is better that it should be solemnly conducted, with certain regulations as to method and time, and place, or that its character should depend upon accidental circumstances, being conformed to the ordinary customs of society? One essential *condition* is the assurance of secrecy with reference to all such confidential communications, in whatsoever form, or under whatsoever circumstances, they may be made. No one can be expected honestly to disclose his sins, his weaknesses, and his temptations, to the minister of God's Word, however great his anxiety and his desire for counsel, unless he can be assured that such revelations will not under any circumstances be divulged. You are aware that the rule of the Church is very strict in this matter, that by the 113th Canon of our Church, the minister who has received a confession is bound not to reveal it to any person whatsoever, under pain of irregularity or of deprivation and incapacity to hold any spiritual

* Nathan was also commissioned to pronounce his pardon after he had confessed his sin.

office. And it is our bounden duty to take heed, that we never give the least occasion for suspicion, that anything communicated to us, as the ministers of God's Holy Word and Sacraments, may possibly be spoken of or made known to any other persons. The ministrations of the Parish Priest must be very indefinite, without point or application to the *special* wants of his people, unless they have such confidence in him, that they are not afraid to make him the depository of their needs, their perplexities, and their infirmities.

To sum up then, our conclusion is this, that private confession is recommended in our system, as remedial rather than as an habitual practice, as a medicine for the relief of troubled consciences, or under special circumstances, and not as one of the ordinary means of grace.* Enough is said to shew that, while the public absolution should suffice and nothing more is necessary, it is allowable to seek for special absolution in this way, but the language is sufficiently guarded to suggest that a more excellent way is, not to require it, to go at once to the fountain head, and by faith to realise the absolution spoken by the Holy Ghost the Comforter to each penitent sinner.† There is unquestionably a danger in some cases, of relying too much upon the guidance of the Priest, so as to weaken the sense of personal responsibility, and of substituting the audible voice, for the secret communication of the Holy Spirit, but the abuse of any good is no argument against its use.‡ Only knowing the danger, you should beware of urging as obligatory what is not so enjoined in Holy Scripture, and while ready, in the performance of your duty, to receive every one who desires the benefit of the ministry of reconciliation, you should not in any way encourage habitual recourse to a remedy appointed for extreme cases.§

The most common mode of evading the force of the Apostolical commission, is to interpret it, as applicable to Church censures or excommunication, asserting that this is the meaning of binding and loosing. But I apprehend that the two commissions are not necessarily the same, and that even if it could be proved that this is the limitation of binding and loosing, it would not follow that the solemn gift of the Holy Ghost and the authority to remit or retain sins is thus limited. It can hardly be supposed that such a solemn method of introducing the authority, merely to inflict or remove Church censures, would be adopted by our Lord. And it is not the punishment of sin that is to be remitted, but the sins themselves. The proposed explanation implies that the congregation, or a

* Cf. Moberley's Bampton Lectures, p. 231.

† Nor could there be any stronger proof that Confession was acting unhealthfully, or was unsuitable under the circumstances, if it were found to interfere with, nay, if it did not rather foster and deepen the free and childlike intercourse of the divinely quickened Spirit with its God.—*Carter Doctrine of Confession*, p. 237.

‡ Cf. The declaration of the Old Catholics, respecting Auricular Confession, published in the Guardian, June 10, 1874.

§ This is the end of extracts from the charge of 1874.

majority, are under censure, since they are to be absolved at every service, where there has been a general confession. This of itself is sufficient evidence that the power and commandment mentioned in the general absolution, being our Lord's commission (as recorded John xx. 23), must refer to *sins*, and not merely their penalty or Church censures. And we may observe that according to *this theory*, retaining should have preceded *remitting* in the commission, as binding preceeds loosing whenever they are mentioned, because there can be nothing to remit until there has been a condemnation or penalty inflicted.

Some persons have pretended that our present Prayer Book, having been several times revised, is now of a different tone from the original book, at the time of the reformation. It may therefore be well to state that, in the Prayer Book of 1552, when it assumed its most Protestant form, the exhortation in the Communion Office is rather stronger than at present, viz: "That he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice and comfort as his conscience may be relieved; and that by the ministry of God's word he may receive comfort, and the benefit of absolution, to the quieting, &c.," where absolution is evidently something over and above, and differing from, ghostly counsel and advice. In the visitation service, the direction is positive, "the Priest shall absolve him," (the words if he humbly and heartily desire it being of a later date,) while the form is identical with the present absolution.

The prayer following the absolution in the Visitation office, has been adduced as evidence that the Priest is directed solemnly to pronounce what is untrue, but it is more respectful to our reformers, to assume that the prayer is in harmony with the absolution. In fact, it is evidently a prayer that God will be pleased to ratify what has been done in His name, that he will not only forgive the sins, but also blot out all remembrance or record of them, and more especially that He will grant to the penitent new life and more abundant grace. Some may object to the principle on which the prayers are framed, but we have other examples of the same, as, for instance, the deep penitence and earnest supplication for mercy of the confession with which the children of God, reconciled through the blood of the Saviour are required to approach the Table of their Lord.

The men whose names are best known, and of highest authority in the Church of England, all concur in the same explanation of the nature of the authority committed to those who are ordained Priests. Such are Archbishop Usher, Bishops Andrewes, Hall, Jeremy Taylor, Sparrow, Ken, Wilson, Horne; Richard Hooker, the learned Doctors, Hammond, Barrow, Comber, besides numerous more modern commentators and writers.

Some authorities have been adduced in opposition to these views, but it will be found that generally they are in reality only opposing the Roman system of auricular confession and absolution

held to be necessary to salvation, and not the permissive system of the Church of England.

In conclusion, I repeat that the difficulty felt by many with respect to absolution is not peculiar to *it*, the question involved being: Does God commonly employ means instead of acting immediately upon the heart? Of all the means and agencies employed, there is none which so much depends upon man as preaching, for the same truths have more or less power according to the ability and eloquence and other qualifications of the Preacher. And yet it is not disputed, that God is "pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." The inestimable benefits enjoyed through the two Holy Sacraments are conveyed through the instrumentality of men, and therefore, apart from revelation, we might assume that human agency would also commonly be employed in conveying pardon to the sinner. The Plymouth Brethren who reject the tenet of ordination to the ministry, and the Quakers who also reject all outward ordinances, may consistently deny this teaching, but they who believe that men are ordained now to the same ministry as that to which the Apostles were called of old, can have no difficulty in admitting the probability of the employment of human agency, in applying the pardon which He alone can grant, which must in every case originate with Himself. Having regard to our Lord's gift, we can have no doubt that this is actually His mode of dealing with men, and referring to the form of Ordination of Priests, we cannot doubt that the teaching of the Church of England is in harmony therewith.

APPENDIX.

It is impossible to give extracts from the writings of all the authorities named, but we may say generally that they assume and maintain the literal sense of the words uttered by our blessed Lord, and most of them also their application to private as well as public absolution, while they condemn the Roman doctrine and practice of compulsory confession, and the necessity of private absolution. I therefore only quote one or two, who would commonly be supposed likely to take a different view. Archbishop Usher (A.D., 1624), of Calvinistic tendencies, in his answer to a Jesuit, who charged the Church of England with rejecting private confession and absolution, says indignantly, "be it known unto him that no kind of confession, either public or private, is disallowed by us that is in any way requisite for the due execution of that ancient power of the keys which Christ bestowed upon his Church. From confession we now proceed to absolution, which it were a pity this man should receive, before he make confession of the open wrong he hath done in charging us to deny that Priests have power to forgive sins. Who

can forgive sins but God alone? Yet doth He forgive by them also, unto whom He hath given power to forgive."—*Answer to a Jesuit.*

Bishop Hall, (A.D., 1616) says: "Neither is this power given only to the Governors of the Church, in relation to the censures to be inflicted or relaxed by them, but to all God's faithful Ministers, in relation to the sins of men, a power not sovereign and absolute, but limited and ministerial. Neither is this only by way of a bare, naked declaration, which might proceed from any other lips, but in the way of an effective and effectual application, by virtue of that delegate or missionary authority, which is by Christ, entrusted to them"—*Resolutions of Divers Cases of Conscience.*

Bishop Horne (A.D., 1790), writes: "The regenerate spirit of a Christian, when such is wounded by sin, must be recovered and restored by godly counsel and wholesome discipline, by penance and absolution, by the medicines of the Word and Sacraments, as duly and properly administered in the Church by tho lawfully and regularly appointed delegates and representatives of the Physician of souls."—*Discourses I*, p. 349.

Chillingworth, the author of the well-known aphorism, "The Bible is the religion of Protestants," complains that Roman adversaries have taken advantage from the unwary expressions of some particular Divines, who, instead of condemning the *enforced* confession, have seemed to void and frustrate all use and exercise of the keys. He says, "since Christ, for your benefit and comfort, hath given authority to his Ministers, upon your unfeigned repentance and contrition, to absolve and release you from your sins, why should I doubt, or be unwilling to exhort and persuade you to make your advantage of this gracious promise of our Saviour. Truly, if I should deal thus with you, I should prove myself a malicious, unchristian-like, malignant Preacher." He then exhorts any who are oppressed with a sense of sin to go to a spiritual physician, "come not to him only with such a mind as you would go to a learned man experienced in the Scriptures, as one that can speak comfortable, quieting words to you, but as to one that hath authority delegated to him from God Himself, to absolve and acquit you of your sins."—*Sermon VII., Works., Vol. III*, p. 187-8.

In addition to the testimony from Divines of past ages, I here insert at some length the published words of one whose experience and world-wide reputation as a Parish Priest entitle him to more than ordinary respect, the Rev. G. H. Wilkinson, sometime Rector of S. Peter's, Eaton Square, now Bishop of Truro, where he succeeded his friend, the present Archbishop of Canterbury. He says.—

"Let us not ignore the fact that, from the beginning the confession of sins to a human being, or rather to God in the presence of a human being, has been authorized by the Almighty,—alike as a help to penitence, and as a comfort to the troubled conscience, and as a debt even to God, the principle of confession prevades the

volume of inspiration." He instances Lev. v. 5,—Achan, Saul, David,—those who came to John the Baptist. And concludes, "I believe that long before the Gospel days, the idea of confession was so recognized by God's ancient people, that it was unnecessary to urge it upon the consciences of those who had been trained in the schools of Israel. It only needed to be *balanced* with the freedom of the Gospel. As it was with the observance of the Sabbath, so was it in this respect, with the whole question of confession. No direct command for either was given in the New Testament. The use of them had become, as it were, a part of the religious instincts of humanity, and their after direction was left to the common-sense of Christendom, guided by the in-dwelling presence of God the Holy Ghost."

"I cannot ignore a truth which the Bible has revealed, and which the Church has entrusted to my care. If I have seen—as I *have* seen—the blessing which has followed upon a *judicious* and *Scriptural* use of this weapon of the spiritual armoury; if this be so, then, I appeal to any unprejudiced mind in this Church—how can I—how dare I—be silent on such a subject, simply because some may abuse it? Am I not obliged, in certain cases, to *permit* confession; nay, sometimes to *move* my brother to unburden his soul?"

"As a wise physician it is my duty to consider the circumstances of those who come to me for advice, to teach God's Truth as simply as possible; to help a man to help himself; to leave nature, as it were to herself, for a time. Then—and only *then*, when after watching the case, and praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I see that this special remedy is needed, I am bound, like the bodily physician, to prescribe that remedy; to repeat it, if necessary, again and again; but—mark the end of my sentence—only to continue its use till the health of the patient is re-established."

"In other words I have to assist my people in every way that my church has sanctioned; but the end and aim of my ministry must be this: to lead them up into the fulness of spiritual manhood; into that living, personal contact with their God and Father, which shall enable them to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might; which shall strengthen them to go up and down in the happy consciousness of a realized forgiveness; which shall send them forth in the power of the In-dwelling Spirit, to guide their lives by the rule of God's Commandments, and to support their weak and tempted spirit by the varied means of grace which their Lord has provided in His Church for their spiritual food and sustenance."

With respect to absolution he says: "Unless we repent and believe, no absolution can be of any avail to our souls. 'Into whatever house ye enter,' said Christ, 'first say Peace be to this house, and if the Son of Peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it; if not, it shall turn to you again.'" So is it with an absolution, public or private. If the heart is prepared by penitence and trust, to receive it, our message of mercy will rest upon that heart; if not,

it will return to us void. God's grace was sufficient for the cleansing of that soul, but that grace has been received in vain."

"Let us remember that we are teaching no new doctrine when we say that Christ has delegated to weak human beings the commission to exercise, as His ministers, a power which belongs absolutely to Himself alone."

"Before our Lord ascended into Heaven, He gave over to His Body, the Church, every power which He had received from His Father, for the deliverance of humanity from the thralldom of sin and satan. With all His priceless goods, He, the Heavenly Bridegroom, endowed the mystic bride whom He had uplifted from her degradation and united to Himself for all eternity. 'I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me. As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. In My name ye shall cast out devils.' You shall have power to drive back satan when he dares to invade that world, with which I have endowed you. 'I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven.' Let due regard be paid to the laws of My Kingdom, and then the signature of My Queen shall be as valid as the sign-manual of her Lord. 'Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.'"

"Before us is a man who is bound by sin and Satan; by conscious guilt and conscious weakness. Bear in mind the points which have already been explained; that unless the man repents and believes no Church has power to help him. In fact, the whole Prayer-Book takes for granted that those who use it do repent and believe. Remember that the Holy Ghost really dwells in the Church of Christ, to give a living force to every act which is done according to the Will of God. Remember also that the Holy Ghost is pledged to every Minister of that Church, for the office and work to which he is called; and that, whatever blessing God may give through other channels, the duly ordained Priest is certain that God will apply his words to every heart which is prepared to receive them."

"If he comes to me, what am I to do? Clearly, for the time I must act as a *judge*, and decide the case according to the recognized law of the Spiritual Kingdom, the word of God. But when, so far as fallible man can be, I am satisfied that the man is sincere, and repents, and believes in Jesus, then, I am told to stand up, without a shadow of a misgiving, in the name of my Church, in the Name of the invisible Head of the Church, and to say, in the strongest possible words: 'Man thou art loosed from thine infirmity; thou art free. Thy sins are forgiven. The Church forgives thee for having sinned against thy fellow-Christians these many years. Thy God forgives thee for having sinned against Him. Jesus has atoned for thy sin. The power of the Devil is

broken, by Christ the Conqueror. Thy prison doors are open. Go out and use thy freedom. I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' Then, I kneel down, after the model of the prayer in the Visitation Service, and I pray God to ratify the word spoken in His Name, for Jesus' sake."

"Of course, the formalist, the hypocrite, the impenitent, the unbelieving, go away from this, as from every other means of grace, unblest. To them it has been 'a savour of death unto death.' The wells which their Father had digged for their refreshment have been poisoned. But to the penitent and believing soul, the word of absolution is indeed applied, by God the Holy Ghost; I speak that which I *know*; I thank God that I have been allowed to see the blessed power *both of public and private absolution.*"

Bishop Moberley, who is opposed to the practice of private confession, is strong upon the importance of the direct communion of the soul with God, insisting upon *this* as one of the first principles of the Gospel, that 'if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,' adds:

"But it is of the great and tender mercy of God also, that knowing the frailty of man and his liability to heavy and continual sin, knowing too the weakness of his heart, and the self-distrusting feebleness of the conscience, very often as little able to support itself as a broken reed when really awakened to the full sense of its guilt and danger, He has added to this gracious scheme of restoration, what I have called the remedial and supplementary institution, whereby the collective priestliness of the universal body may operate to support, and supply, the otherwise failing and imperfect strength of the single guilty and desponding Christian.—*Bampton Lectures*, p. 135,

Again: "O let no shrinking from the honest and faithful use of the divinely descended powers, that come to the Church and to her priest from the holy words and breath of Christ, let no base fears of worldly objection or scorn, lead a Priest of God to grudge to his dying brother the clear outspoken ringing words of holy absolution, which the Church has put into his mouth, which the sad sinner humbly and heartily craves. Do not mock the dying patient by reminding him, that he too is a physician. Do not cheat the broken-hearted penitent, by telling him that he is a priest himself. God has provided an express comfort for him, in his extremity of distress; God has given to you and to none but you the very anodyne for his poor soul's pain. You are cruel, you are faithless, you are untrue to your holy calling and duty, if out of fear of man you shrink from using it.—*Bampton Lectures*, p. 226.

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